

**MINUTES
BURKE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING**

The Burke County Board of Commissioners held a special meeting on Thursday, February 8, 2024, at 8:15 a.m., in the Commissioners' Meeting Room, Burke County Services Building, 110 N. Green Street, Entrance E, in Morganton, North Carolina. The purpose of the special meeting was to receive updates from area internet service providers and professional staff in addition to holding a short discussion on broadband. Chairman Brittain executed the public notice which was published on January 30, 2024. The meeting was streamed live on the County's YouTube channel, BurkeCountyNC, and it was broadcast on the local cable systems. The agenda, in its entirety, was posted to the County's website, www.burkenc.org, several days prior to the meeting. Those present were:

COMMISSIONERS:

Jeffrey C. Brittain, Chairman
Scott Mulwee, Vice Chairman
Randy Burns
Johnnie W. Carswell
Phil Smith

STAFF:

Brian Epley, County Manager
Margaret Pierce, Deputy County Manager/Finance Director
J.R. Simpson, II, County Attorney
Kat Wright, Deputy Clerk to the Board
Kay Honeycutt Draughn, Clerk to the Board

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Brittain called the meeting to order at 8:15 a.m.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Motion: To approve the agenda as presented.

RESULT: APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]

MOVER: Phil Smith, Commissioner

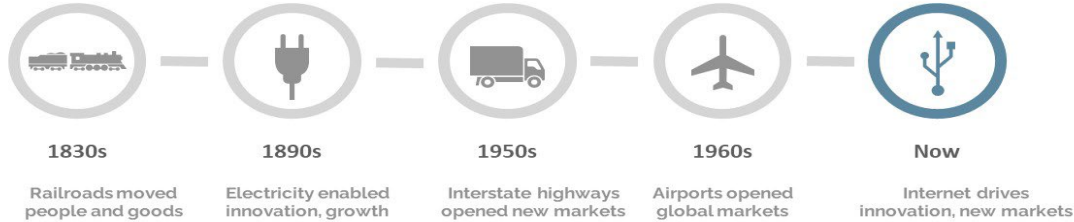
AYES: Jeffrey C. Brittain, Scott Mulwee, Randy Burns, Johnnie W. Carswell, and Phil Smith

PRESENTATIONS**ISP - PRESENTATIONS FROM INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Brian Epley, County Manager, provided a brief comprehensive overview of the County's broadband initiative. Highlights of his presentation were as follows:

Connecting Rural Communities The Future of Digital Connectivity/Economic Development 	FY 23-24 Commissioners' Strategic Plan  FOCUS AREA 1: COMMUNITY ADVANCEMENT To invest in cultural capital and advancement strategies that promote participative governance that elevates a community to live, work and play – while also positioning Burke County as a community of choice.  FOCUS AREA 2: ECONOMIC GROWTH & SUSTAINMENT Promotion of Burke County as a business and economic center in the region through recruitment of new industry, creating a healthy business climate for existing businesses.  FOCUS AREA 3: PUBLIC SAFETY & WELL BEING To ensure the safety of our residents through efficient and effective public safety agencies.  FOCUS AREA 4: FISCAL STEWARDSHIP Pursuit of the high-performing organization model that ensures high quality, transparent and efficient use of public resources.  FOCUS AREA 5: EMPLOYER OF CHOICE To promote a professional value-based employee-centric workplace that promotes innovation, performance, and integrity, and differentiation.
FY 2023-2024 Commissioners' Top Priorities	Comprehensive human capital pay and classification study – including job description reviews and market-based wages Pursue Substantial Equivalency (OSHR) and modernization of all Burke County Personnel Policies Identify census track data specific to broadband availability and pursue grant based public-private expansion that aims to cover more than 90% of Burke County households Consideration of County wide referendum to support Article 46 sales tax referendum Implementation of a county-wide Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Facilities Master Plan including funding policies, execution strategies and project timelines
Why Did We Get Involved?      Economic Development Healthcare Government Education Nonprofits  High-Speed Connectivity Ties our work together  © 2020 Harrison Edwards, Inc. All Rights Reserved. 4	

Broadband is Critical Infrastructure



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Generational Infrastructure

High-Speed Connectivity is Our
Generation's Infrastructure Project.

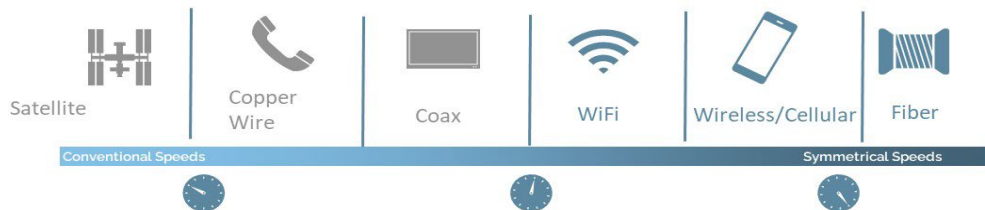
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A Municipal Crisis Looms



8

Delivering Broadband Speed, Capacity



7

A Municipal Crisis Looms



8

NC GREAT Grants... A Statewide Response:

The Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) Program funds the terrestrial deployment of broadband within unserved areas of economically distressed counties.

The grants help bring high-speed internet to thousands of North Carolinians, businesses and farms in the most rural and remote areas of the state. These areas include both Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties as well as rural census tracts located in development Tier 3 areas that are currently served by less than 25 megabytes per second download and 3 megabytes per second upload speeds.

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A Statewide Response:

President Tracy Johnson – Presidential Initiative



North Carolina Association
of County Commissioners

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NC GREAT Grants... A Statewide Response:

- 125 Total State-Wide Grants – Impacted 93 NC Counties
- \$347,873,102 in awarded grants
- 139,599 Potential Household Impacts
- 4,447 Potential Commercial Impacts
- Average State grant cost per improved passing \$2,415

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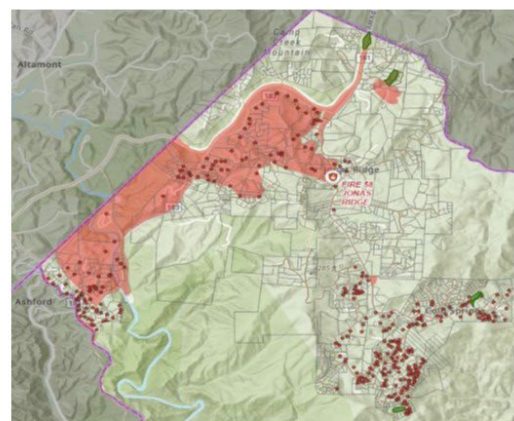
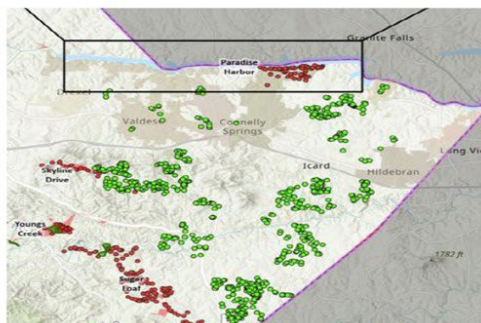
BROADBAND UPDATE IN BURKE COUNTY

GREAT Grant – Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology

The Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) Program funds the terrestrial deployment of broadband within unserved areas of economically distressed counties.

The grants help bring high-speed internet to thousands of North Carolinians, businesses, and farms in the most rural and remote areas of the state.

The County does not have direct input into the GREAT program applications. All of that is handled by the service provider in their application to the State. There were four (4) GREAT grant applicants for Burke County. Of the four (4) only one (1) has been awarded by the State and currently funded (by the North Carolina General Assembly). That was Brightspeed (Formerly Century Link) – and the entirety of that investment is in Eastern Burke County. See below for a map. The Green Dots represent plan expansion of broadband.



Great Grant Outcomes

- 2 Awards
- \$6.2MM Investment
- 1,838 new locations

What is next.....

CAB Grant Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Program:

- The Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) Program provides an opportunity for individual N.C. counties to partner with NCDIT to fund broadband deployment projects in unserved areas of each county.

Burke County Appropriation:

\$1.0 MM Federal Grant
\$300k State Grant

3:1 State Match

\$4.0 MM Total Purchase Power



Mr. Epley also reported that, as of this meeting, there are only 1,294 unserved or underserved households in Burke County.

Chairman Brittain opened the floor for questions or comments; there being none, he invited Steve Brewer, Director of Governmental Affairs for Brightspeed, to approach the podium. Highlights of his presentation were as follows:



Burke County, NC

Brightspeed
February 8, 2024

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Transition to Brightspeed



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Service Levels

Positive service levels trends since transaction close

- Mean Time to Repair – 63% improvement
- Mean Time to Install – 54% improvement

With Transition to Fiber, Improved Customer Experience

- Fiber is not stolen
- Weather has far less impact on fiber
- New deployment process allows for quicker restoration when facilities are damaged
- Our technology can detect and address issues before the customer notices a problem.
- Customers can see troubled connections within the home/office and use data to help Brightspeed troubleshoot and restore service.

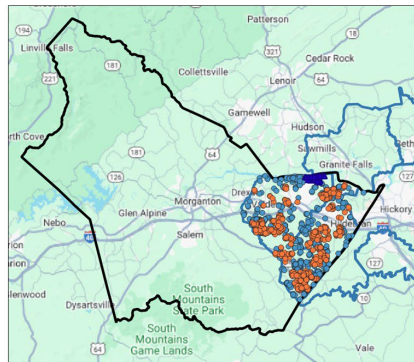
Additional Fiber Grant Opportunities on the Horizon

- CAB
- BEAD

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Brightspeed looks forward to partnering with Burke County on future FTTH projects



Map Legend	
Symbol Name	# of Locations
● Eligible CAB Locations	493
● Existing Brightspeed GREAT Loc.	620
▲ Existing Spectrum RDOF/GREAT Loc.	69
— County Boundary	N/A
— Brightspeed Territory	N/A

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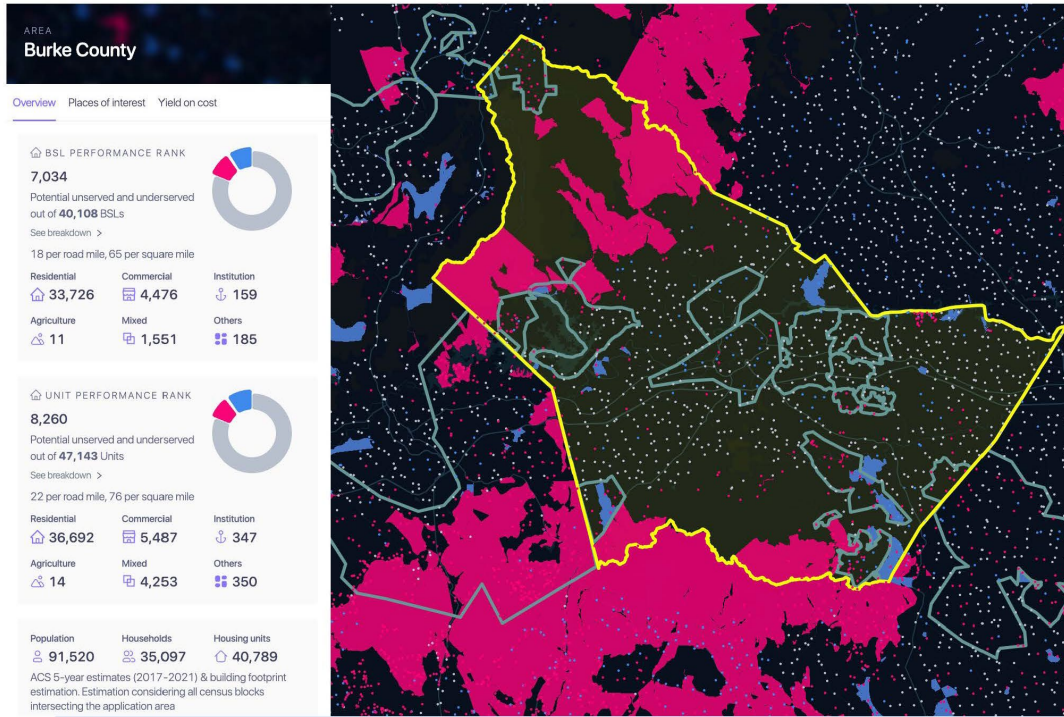
Mr. Brewer noted that Brightspeed plans to add 6,000 fiber passings not yet depicted on the map above. These passings will specifically be installed in areas ineligible for any grants.

Chairman Brittain opened the floor for questions or comments. Mr. Brewer addressed a funding inquiry from Vice Chairman Mulwee and noted that BEAD refers to the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment program which is the name of an associated legislative initiative to achieve universal coverage. He then fielded a series of queries from Commissioner Carswell regarding upload and download speeds, fiber types, contingency plans for damaged fiber, and monthly service costs. Responding to Vice Chairman Mulwee's question about programs for low-income families, Mr. Brewer highlighted that Brightspeed matches the ACP (Affordable Connectivity Program) federal subsidy, offering one of their packages completely free to eligible individuals. Commissioner Carswell voiced concerns about the significant portion of Burke County qualifying for ACP, stressing the importance of carefully selecting the best product at the best price for citizens. Additionally, he inquired about some of the BEAD program requirements. Mr. Brewer concluded by addressing Commissioner Carswell's final question regarding development progress. There being nothing further, Chairman Brittain invited Zachary Chiz, Foothills Broadband, to the podium. Highlights of his presentation were as follows:

Business Model – Valdese, NC For the people, by the people!  Foothills Broadband Foothills Broadband - Confidential	Meeting Itinerary - Our Story and Team - Current Build Plan – Valdese and Beyond - Expansion Project Buy Local, Stay Local, Family!
Why Did We Choose Valdese? Zachary and Jodi Chiz grew up in Drexel, NC. Jodi's parents now reside in Valdese, NC up on Flat Gap Mountain. For the last several years, the unavailability of internet access on the mountain has proven to be a challenge that only continues to be more evident. Jodi's parents don't have internet access or cell phone service where they live. In 2021, both of her parents got COVID and were very sick. With no way to check-in on them, the last resort was driving almost 2 hours to physically lay eyes on them to make sure they were okay. Add to that, Zachary and Jodi have two small children who LOVE Nana and Papaw. Being that they have never lived in the same town, Facetime and being able to have that relationship and connection with them over long-distance has been essential to everyone's well-being. It may seem silly to some, but until you live in a place in today's world where you can't just answer the phone when it rings, or connect to Wi-Fi so that you can be in touch with the world around you, you realize how disconnected and isolated that can feel. Zachary and Jodi chose Valdese to be able to connect their family to the world. To provide the opportunity for young kids to Facetime their grandparents. To provide access to make sure people can call for help if they need it. It's bigger than just surfing the world wide web. It's reconnecting people to people, and providing basic levels of access for safety, security, and support. They look forward to helping your family get and stay connected to their loved ones and the world around them! Our Story	

Buy Local, Hire Local! - Small, but capable and dedicated! 7 total employees, ramping to 15+ in 2024 45 years+ of industry knowledge - Construction, Engineering, and Manufacturing - Contract Labor is local as well! - Local to North Carolina	Foothills Broadband
Our Team	Current Business Plan – Valdese & Beyond
Utilizing Gold Standard Technology - Truly 100% Fiber To The Home design - Passive Fiber Network bringing Reliability and Future Proof Investments! - Utilizing XGS-PON Technology 1-box Home Solution Capable of 10gbps+ - Best in Industry Manufacturers - Nokia Optics - Juniper Routing & Switching Core - Corning Fiber	- Cut the Cord to Cable, and go Fiber! - Fiber to the Home - Fiber to the Business - Internet Packages - Home 100/100 megabytes - Home+ 1000/1000 megabytes (1 Gbps) - Home Pro 2000/2000 megabytes (2 Gbps) - Business 500/500 megabytes - Business+ 1000/1000 megabytes (1 Gbps) - Business Pro 2000/2000 megabytes (2 Gbps) *Symmetrical FIBER Internet
Current Build Area – Q4, 2024 Completion	

Expansion Project – Q4, 2027 Completion



Potential CAB Area's in Burke County

Flatgap Extensions

Application Area	Unservd		Road Miles	Unit/Mile	BSL/ Mile
	Units	Underserved BSL			
Flatgap Project	97	96	8.9	11	11
Flatgap Project Ext - 01	30	30	4.8	7	7

Competition

7 PROVIDERS

0 Fiber, 3 Wireless, 3 Satellite & 1 Other



Potential CAB Area's in Burke County

Southeast Burke County

Application Area	Unserved		Road Miles	Unit/Mile	BSL/ Mile
	Units	Underserved BSL			
Hickory, NC - 01	192	120	12.3	16	10
Hickory, NC - 02	325	304	37.1	9	9
Connelly Springs, NC - 01	49	47	3.2	16	15
Connelly Springs, NC - 02	224	219	21.8	11	11

Competition

7 PROVIDERS

0 Fiber, 2 Wireless, 3 Satellite & 2 Other

RDOF

Space Exploration Technologies Corp.

STATUS

Default

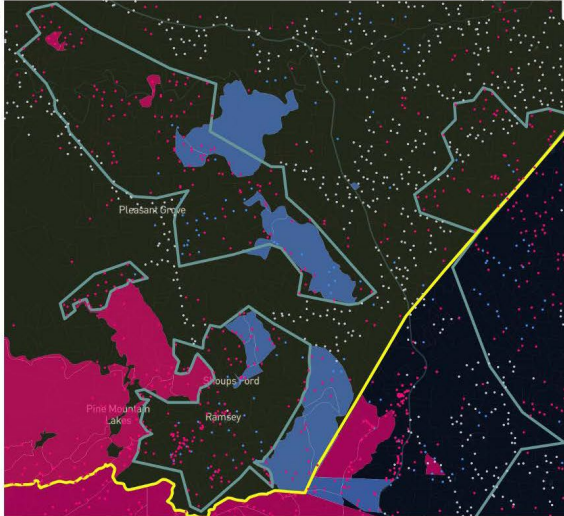
TIER

Above-Baseline

LATENCY

Low

SERVICE STATUS BY BSL	RESIDENTIAL	COMMERCIAL
Served	68	14
Underserved	110	6
Unserved	339	62
Not Available	0	0



Potential CAB Area's in Burke County

Jonas Ridge, NC - 01

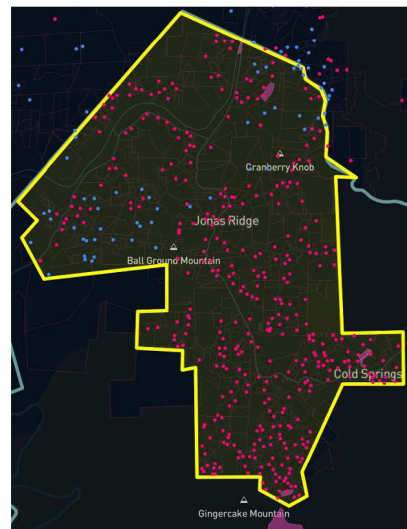
Application Area	County	BSL	Road Miles	BSL/ Mile
Jonas Ridge, NC - 01	Burke County	655	50.97	13

Competition

8 PROVIDERS

0 Fiber, 4 Wireless, 3 Satellite & 1 Other

SERVICE STATUS BY BSL	RESIDENTIAL	COMMERCIAL
Served	0	0
Underserved	56	12
Unserved	439	143
Not Available	0	0



Potential CAB Area's in Burke County

Morganton, NC - 01

Application Area	Unservd		Road Miles	Unit/Mile	BSL/ Mile
	Units	Underserved			
Morganton, NC - 01	255	191	18.6	14	11

Competition

9 PROVIDERS

0 Fiber, 4 Wireless, 3 Satellite & 2 Other

ROOF

Space Exploration Technologies Corp.

STATUS TIER LATENCY

Default

Above-Baseline

Low

SERVICE STATUS BY BSL	RESIDENTIAL	COMMERCIAL
Served	75	6
Underserved	1	1
Unservd	116	16
Not Available	0	0



Closing Comments

- We are a local company
 - Local people
 - Local knowledge
 - Love for Burke County!
- Building a network that is future proofed
 - Fiber To The Home
- Helping Burke County save money!

Chairman Brittain opened the floor for questions or comments. Mr. Chiz responded to a clarifying question from Commissioner Smith. He highlighted that his packages have no hidden fees, price increases, or leasing equipment fees in response to a question from Commissioner Carswell. Additionally, Mr. Chiz responded to a development inquiry from Commissioner Carswell, assuring that the cost modeling will keep the price the same for everyone across Burke County, regardless of location. Commissioner Carswell then posed a technical question regarding service operations. Subsequently, a discussion unfolded about infrastructure following a question from Commissioner Burns. There being nothing further, Chairman Brittain invited Michael Tanck and Joe Prater, Spectrum / Charter Communications, to the podium.

Mr. Tanck reported that he is retiring and that future communications will need to occur with Joe Prater until the local government affairs position is filled. Mr. Prater oversees grants with several states and is very familiar with the details. Highlights of Mr. Prater's presentation were as follows:

BURKE COUNTY BROADBAND EXPANSION

FEBRUARY 8, 2024
MIKE TANCK & JOE PRATER
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS



Charter
COMMUNICATIONS

OUR BURKE COUNTY IMPACT

- Nearly **35,000** structures served
- Nearly **22,000** existing customer relationships
 - 21K+ Internet Subs
 - 10K Video Subs
 - 7.2K Voice Subs
 - 9K Mobile Subs
- Currently building to **2,000+ additional locations** through RDOF + NC GREAT



Charter | **Spectrum**

BROADBAND GRANTS & PARTNERSHIP

Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF)

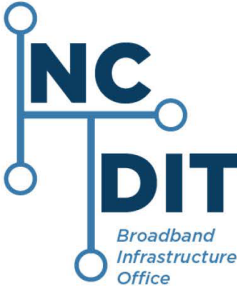
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
- Awarded 2021 (6-year build timeline)
- 700+ locations, 104+ miles**, all locations in completely unserved (<25/3 Mbps) census blocks – Fiber to the Home (FTTH)
- Federal funding - **\$1,722,516**
- Estimated Completion – Q2 2025*

Growing Rural Economies through Access to Technology (GREAT)

- State of North Carolina – ARPA Funds
- Contract October 2023 (2-year build timeline)
- 1,119 locations, 110+ miles** - Fiber to the Home (FTTH)
- Funding:

NCDIT	\$ 3,867,480
Charter	<u>\$ 1,657,492</u>
Total	\$5,524,972
- Estimated Completion – Q3 2025*





Charter | **Spectrum**

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Jonas Ridge

- Proximity to Charter GREAT
- Proximity to Charter RDOF

Southeast

- Proximity to Charter Network
- Proximity to Charter RDOF

Brindletown

- Proximity to Charter Network
- Proximity to Charter GREAT
- Proximity to Charter RDOF

SERVICES OFFERED

Broadband – High-Speed Internet

- Standard: 300 Mbps
- Ultra: 500 Mbps
- Giga: 1,000 Mbps

Video Service

- Multiple tiers of video service
- Thousands of On Demand titles
- Spectrum TV App

Home Phone

- Unlimited nationwide calling

Mobile

- Exclusive to Spectrum broadband customers
- 5G service with NO contracts, added taxes or hidden fees
- Fastest Growing Mobile carrier in the country



Charter Spectrum

CURRENT OFFERINGS

UP TO 300 Mbps	UP TO 500 Mbps	UP TO 1 Gbps
SPECTRUM INTERNET® + WIFI + MOBILE	SPECTRUM INTERNET® ULTRA + WIFI + MOBILE	SPECTRUM INTERNET® GIG + WIFI + MOBILE
\$49.99/mo Call to Order 844-830-6213	\$69.99/mo Call to Order 844-830-6213	\$79.99/mo Call to Order 844-830-6213
Ready to order? Shop online	Ready to order? Shop online	Ready to order? Shop online
Fast, reliable, secure internet	Turbocharged internet	Fastest internet
Best for streaming and browsing	Best for remote work and calls	Best for gaming

Charter Spectrum

QUESTIONS?

Charter
COMMUNICATIONS

Chairman Brittain opened the floor for questions or comments. Vice Chairman Mulwee raised concerns regarding challenges faced by individuals covered by RDOF (Rural Digital Opportunity Fund) and inquired about the projected completion timeline for the project. Mr. Prater emphasized that RDOF is a commitment to offer availability of services to 100% of homes within that census block. Commissioner Carswell expressed reservations about the RDOF

program and sought information on the number of sign-ups for services in the Jonas Ridge and South Mountain areas, both current and anticipated, upon service availability. This prompted a discussion on the program's status and expected completion timeline. Upon the Board's invitation, Mr. Tanck approached the podium and provided insights, indicating current sign-up rates of approximately 60% – 70%, with optimism for higher penetration rates in newly covered areas. Commissioner Carswell inquired about RDOF marketing strategies, which were direct sales teams going door-to-door and a direct mail piece. Vice Chairman pressed Mr. Prater about what prevents Spectrum / Charter from leaving the area in six (6) years if the signup rate is less than desired, to which Mr. Prater assured that the company was committed to providing services to the community and cited the severe FCC (Federal Communications Commission) penalties for service discontinuation. Commissioner Carswell inquired about the ability for competition to build in the area. Mr. Prater advised that the RDOF areas are open for other providers to build in.

There being nothing further, Chairman Brittain thanked all the internet service providers for coming to provide updates.

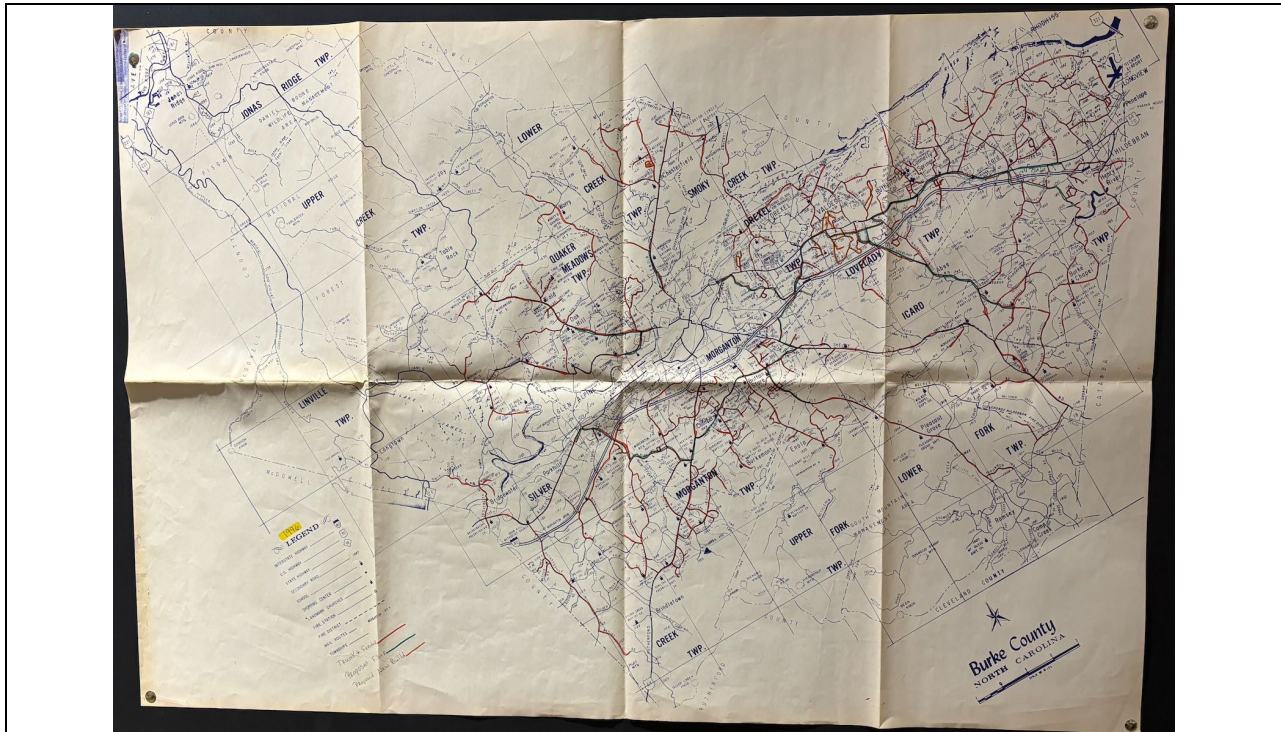
RESULT: NO ACTION TAKEN.

CM - UPDATE ON THE COUNTY'S BROADBAND INITIATIVE

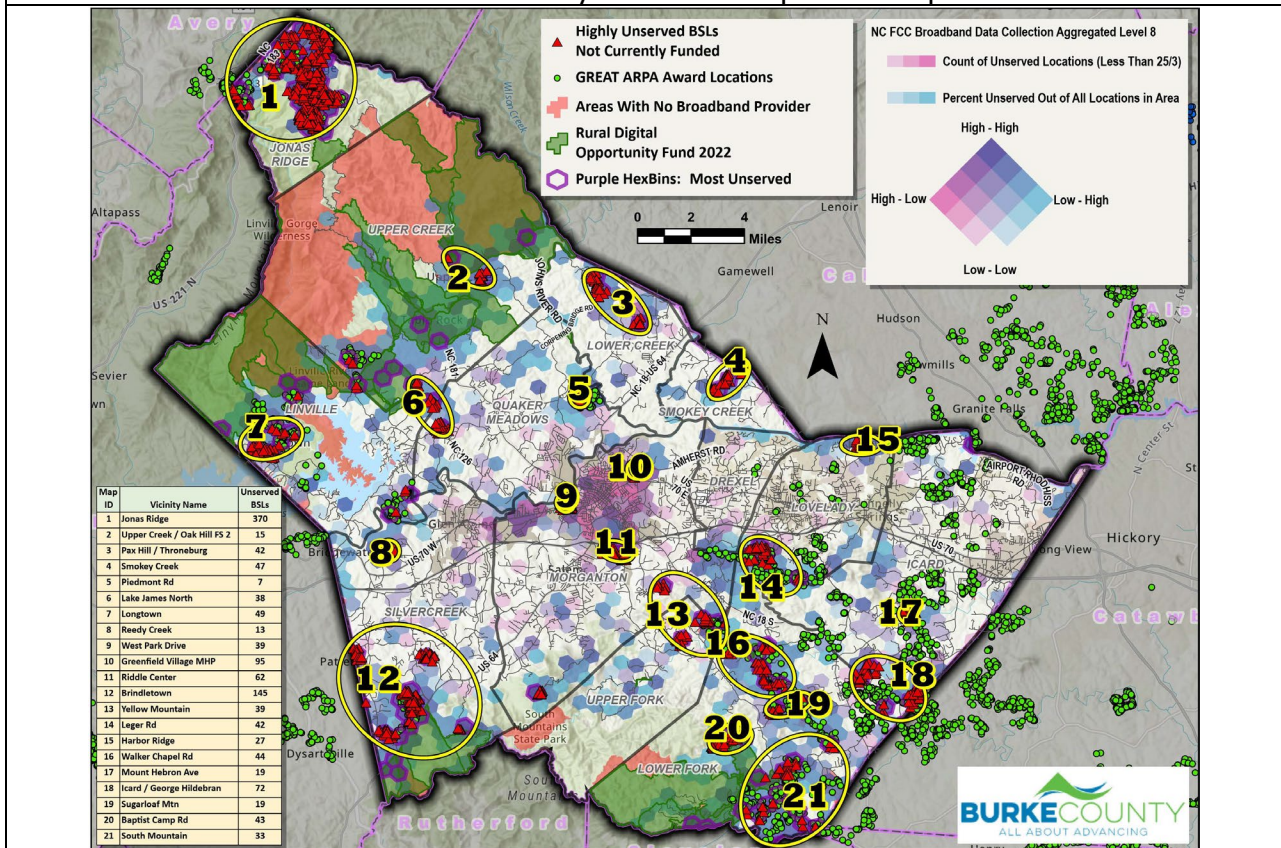
County Manager Epley presented a broadband expansion map from 1996 during the meeting to underscore Burke County's long-standing prioritization of this issue. He expressed confidence in achieving 90% coverage through the Continued Access to Broadband (CAB) program. Currently, only 1,294 broadband serviceable locations lack funded, planned coverage. Mr. Epley emphasized that 100% county-wide coverage is achievable in the next couple of years, with CAB being a crucial step towards that goal. An interactive version of the broadband expansion map was demonstrated during the meeting which is hereby incorporated into the meeting minutes by reference.

Chairman Brittain opened the floor for questions or comments. Commissioner Carswell requested further clarification from Mr. Epley on broadband grants. Mr. Epley explained that CAB is a grant facilitated by the NC Department of Information Technology (NCDIT), managed by Jeff Brooks, Senior Manager at the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office. CAB is the first process that allows dialogue between local government, state government and internet service providers. He highlighted that \$6.2 million has been invested in Burke County's broadband expansion through the GREAT grant program with no local funding contribution. Currently, 1,850 households have broadband access, leaving 1,294 without it. Unlike the GREAT grant, CAB requires a local match, for which \$1 million from ARPA funding and \$300,000 from a state grant have been allocated. The State of North Carolina offers a 3:1 match with the CAB grant, translating to approximately a \$4 million capital expansion budget. Pending Board approval, Burke County will communicate broadband priority areas to the state, which will then handle the request for proposals, solicit private internet service provider applications, evaluate cost per passing and then award the project to an agency. Mr. Epley expressed confidence in CAB significantly increasing coverage for the remaining population without access. Chairman Brittain acknowledged the challenge of providing broadband access to the remaining areas and thanked staff for their hard work on the broadband expansion initiative. Commissioner Carswell made some closing remarks and expressed appreciation to Jeff Brooks, Nate Denny, and Morissa Angie for their assistance and to the internet service providers. Mr. Epley responded to a clarifying question from Commissioner Burns on the definition of "underserved" for broadband

service. There being nothing further, Chairman Brittain expressed appreciation to the I.T. Director, Scott Black, and called for a motion.



1996 Burke County Broadband Expansion Map



2024 Burke County Broadband Expansion Map

Motion: To accept the report and priority areas map as presented. Further, to authorize the County Manager to take the necessary steps to move forward with the State of North Carolina Department of Information Technology.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Johnnie W. Carswell, Commissioner
AYES:	Jeffrey C. Brittain, Scott Mulwee, Randy Burns, Johnnie W. Carswell, and Phil Smith

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

BOC - DISCUSSION ON BROADBAND

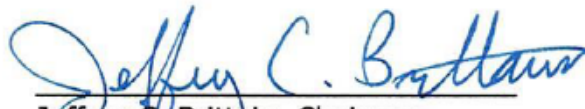
Chairman Brittain opened the floor for a general discussion on the information provided by the internet service providers and the County's professional staff. With all questions addressed adequately and a robust discussion having taken place, Chairman Brittain called for a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURN

Motion: To adjourn at 9:39 a.m.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Johnnie W. Carswell, Commissioner
AYES:	Jeffrey C. Brittain, Scott Mulwee, Randy Burns, Johnnie W. Carswell, and Phil Smith

Approved this 16th day of April 2024.


 Jeffrey C. Brittain, Chairman
 Burke Co. Board of Commissioners

Attest:


 Kay Honeycutt Draughn, CMC, NCMCC
 Clerk to the Board